



State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Health Care Services



EDMUND G. BROWN JR.
Governor

March 11, 2014

TO: MEDI-CAL PROVIDERS

SUBJECT: IMPROVING ACCESS TO NALOXONE IN CALIFORNIA

Public health in California and across the United States is threatened by drug overdoses which now outnumber motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of injury related mortality. The vast majority of these overdoses involve prescription opioids.¹

An intervention, which may mitigate this risk and you can implement today, is the routine provision of take-home naloxone to your patients who are prescribed long-term and/or high dose opioids. Naloxone (Narcan) is an opioid antagonist which rapidly reverses opioid induced respiratory depression. Since 1996, naloxone has been distributed to over 50,000 lay persons who have reversed more than 10,000 overdoses.²

Like other medications, naloxone can be prescribed in the usual course of patient care and dispensed by community pharmacies. Naloxone should be considered for any patient who is on chronic opioids or who is known to use opioids regardless of the source. Similar to epinephrine, naloxone is a bystander administered drug which means that caregivers should be instructed on the proper use and administration.

Under California Civil Code § 1714.22, licensed health care providers may prescribe naloxone to individuals at risk for opioid overdose and their family members or friends. This law protects the naloxone prescriber and the lay person who administers naloxone from civil and criminal liability. Additionally, Health and Safety Code § 11376.5 protects lay persons from arrest when seeking medical assistance during a drug overdose.

Naloxone is covered by Medi-Cal, Medicare and many other health plans. It is given as an intramuscular injection or an intranasal spray. Intranasal administration is as effective and more convenient; however, the nasal atomizers may not be routinely available from pharmacies or paid for by health plans. Atomizers are covered by Medi-Cal with an approved Treatment Authorization Request (TAR).

For detailed information on dosing and administration of naloxone, please go to the following website:
<http://prescribetoprevent.org/>.

For additional information regarding the coverage of naloxone for Medi-Cal patients, please contact Mike Wofford, Pharm. D., Chief of the Pharmacy Policy Branch, by email at mike.wofford@dhcs.ca.gov.

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY DR. NEAL D. KOHATSU

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¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/overdose/facts.html>

² <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6106a1.htm>